

[10191/1977]

PROTECTIVE LAYER

Field Of The Invention

The present invention relates to a protective layer which is relatively permeable for CO₂ and is relatively impermeable for SO₂.

Background Information

Such a protective layer is used, for example, to protect a CO₂-sensitive polymer layer of a smoke detector from damage or contamination due to SO₂. Such a CO₂-sensitive polymer layer is used as a gas sensor in a smoke detector to detect a CO₂ content in a room where the smoke detector is installed. The CO₂-sensitive polymer layer preferably has a membrane composed of a polymer matrix (e.g., polydimethylsiloxane), an auxiliary base (tetraalkylammonium hydroxide) and a pH-sensitive dye (e.g., thymol blue or other derivatives). When this CO₂-sensitive membrane is exposed to CO₂, it leads to reversible reactions, preferably detectable by an optical element, in particular also by electrical or mass-sensitive elements, thus permitting an inference regarding the CO₂ content in the room monitored.

However, when this CO₂-sensitive membrane comes in contact with SO₂, it leads to irreversible reactions in the sensor material and thus to destruction of the CO₂-sensitive feature of the sensor. Since this reaction of the sensor membrane to SO₂ is irreversible, SO₂ reaction products accumulate on the membrane, so that even a low SO₂ concentration will damage the sensor membrane over a period of time and decreases its CO₂ sensitivity, so that a smoke detector equipped with such a CO₂-sensitive membrane sensor will ultimately become useless.

Known protective layers are designed as compressed powder pellets or granules which are

relatively impermeable for SO₂ but relatively permeable for CO₂. Likewise, there are known molecular filters which utilize differences in the molecular structure of the CO₂ molecules and are thus relatively impermeable for SO₂ molecules and relatively permeable for CO₂ molecules. However, one disadvantage when such a protective layer is used to protect a CO₂ sensor is that the CO₂ molecules must first penetrate through this protective layer to reach the CO₂ sensor. Accordingly, the period of time needed for the CO₂ molecules to reach the CO₂ sensor may be greatly prolonged. This increase in time has an especially serious effect when the CO₂ molecules are in movement merely due to their temperature-related kinetic energy (Brownian motion) in the absence of a directional flow, which is usually the case in propagation of smoke in the event of a fire. When such a protective layer is then used in a smoke alarm, the response time of the smoke alarm is increased due to the period of time required for the gas molecules to penetrate through the protective layer; in other words, the period of time until the CO₂ sensor detects an elevated CO₂ concentration is longer.

Summary Of The Invention

The protective layer according to the present invention, however, has the advantage that the CO₂ molecules need only a relatively short period of time to penetrate through the protective layer. When using the protective layer according to the present invention in a smoke alarm, this yields the advantage that the lengthening of the response time of the smoke alarm due to the protective layer is reduced.

The present invention is based on the finding that the oxidation product of SO₂, namely SO₃, is a strongly oxidizing and hygroscopic acid anhydride which reacts further immediately to form a sulfate (SO₄²⁻). However the resulting sulfates may be deposited on the carrier material, so that sulfates are adsorbed in the protective layer.

SO₂ molecules thus accumulate on the carrier and are stored there, while CO₂ molecules can penetrate through the protective layer without reacting. Theoretically, a single contact of an SO₂ molecule with the carrier surface provided with the oxidizing agent is sufficient to trigger the above-mentioned reaction, so complicated structures (such as those in a compressed powder pellet, for example) need not be formed in the protective layer to guarantee this one

contact with a probability bordering on certainty. Accordingly, CO₂ molecules need not penetrate through any complicated protective layer structure, so that CO₂ molecules can penetrate through the protective layer according to the present invention in a relatively unhindered and undelayed manner.

According to a preferred embodiment, the carrier may have at least one tube whose inside wall is provided with the oxidizing agent. In this embodiment, the SO₂ molecules and the CO₂ molecules penetrate through this tube axially, in which case there is a probability according to the laws of probability for the molecules striking the inside wall of the tube coated with the oxidizing agent. Due to this contact, an SO₂ molecule may become adsorbed on the carrier while a CO₂ molecule will rebound away from it without reacting and will continue on its way. The value for this adsorption probability can be determined as a function of a mean length of free path of the molecules by using a ratio of the cross section of the tube to the length of the tube.

Brief Description Of The Drawings

Figure 1 shows a longitudinal section through a first embodiment of the protective layer according to the present invention.

Figure 2 shows a perspective view of a second embodiment of the protective layer according to the present invention.

Figure 3 shows a side view of a third embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4a shows a side view of a fourth embodiment of the protective layer according to the present invention.

Figure 4b shows a top view of a fourth embodiment according to the present invention.

Detailed Description

According to Figure 1, a smoke detector 3 is mounted on a wall 2 in a room 1, in particular on a room ceiling; in the event smoke develops in room 1, this smoke detector should deliver a warning signal accordingly. For this purpose, smoke detector 3 has a CO₂-sensitive sensor 4 equipped with a CO₂-sensitive membrane 5. In addition, smoke detector 3 has a carrier 10, which is designed here as a cylindrical tube 6, in particular a round cylindrical tube. In this embodiment, this tube 6 is part of a protective layer 7 according to the present invention which is marked by figure bracket 7. CO₂ sensor 4 here is separated from room 1 by this protective layer 7, i.e., by tube 6.

Tube 6 is mounted in an airtight mount on smoke detector 3 on one axial end, so that tube 6 encloses CO₂ sensor 4. The axial end of tube 6 opposite CO₂ sensor 4 is open and exposed to a gas present in room 1. An inside wall 8 of tube 6 is provided with a coating 9 of a nonvolatile oxidizing agent. For example, potassium permanganate may be used as the oxidizing agent. Tube 6 may be made of aluminum oxide, for example.

The protective layer according to the present invention functions as follows:

As soon as an SO₂ molecule strikes inside wall 8 of tube 6 (the path of motion of such an SO₂ molecule is represented by an interrupted line), the SO₂ molecule is oxidized to an SO₃ molecule by the oxidizing agent, forming manganese dioxide (MnO₂). The acid anhydride SO₃ immediately reacts further to (SO₄²⁻) and combines with released potassium compounds to form K₂SO₄. The solids formed by these reactions, namely MnO₂ and K₂SO₄, are deposited on inside wall 8 of tube 6, so that to this extent the SO₂ molecules are adsorbed by carrier 10 of layer 7 or by tube 6. Tube 6 is preferably made of a corrosion-resistant material that is resistant to sulfuric acid media, so that neither SO₂ nor SO₃ molecules nor (SO₄²⁻) can damage tube 6.

In contrast with an SO₂ molecule, a CO₂ molecule (its path of motion represented by a solid line) is not adsorbed on inside wall 8 of tube 6, but instead is deflected, so that the CO₂ molecule can strike membrane 5 of CO₂ sensor 4 without any great delay. As soon as a sufficient quantity of CO₂ molecules striking membrane 5 has triggered the proper response, smoke alarm 3 delivers the warning signal.

According to Figure 2, carrier 10 of protective layer 7 according to the present invention may also be designed as a block which may be composed of a plurality of axially parallel cylindrical tubes 6 arranged side by side. In this embodiment, tubes 6 have a rectangular cross section, in particular a square cross section. Here again, inside walls 8 are provided with oxidizing agent coating 9.

Such block-like carriers 10 can be produced especially easily from monolithic catalysts, which then need only be provided with oxidizing agent coating 9.

According to Figure 3, carrier 10 of protective layer 7 may also be designed as a block, individual tubes 6 aligned radially with respect to a straight line perpendicular to the plane of the drawing or a point 11. In the specific embodiment illustrated in Figure 3, tubes 6 are not cylindrical in shape but instead they have a cross section tapering in the direction of the point or line 11. This embodiment allows molecules to penetrate into tubes 6 from a large solid angle range, so that CO₂ molecules can reach CO₂ sensor 4 from practically all directions.

According to Figures 4a and 4b, carrier 10 of protective layer 7 is again formed from a block, which here is composed of multiple grids 12 stacked one above the other, each being formed by a plurality of intersecting grid rods 13. Individual grids 12 need not be aligned with one another and stacked as in Figures 4a and 4b, and instead individual grids 12 may also be arranged with an offset. Oxide coating 9 here is applied to the surface of grid rods 13. The probability of adsorption is determined by the number of grids 12 stacked together and by their mesh; in other words, this is the probability that an SO₂ molecule penetrating into protective layer 7 will strike the surface of one of grid rods 13 and will react with the oxidizing agent there, thus being adsorbed in protective layer 7.